

Rev. Murdo Campbell - Losing Christ

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] If we could with the Lord's help and with the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the Gospel according to John chapter 13, John chapter 13, and if we take as our text the words of verse 36, I want to look at everything that we read, but if we just read again in verse 36, John 13 and verse 36, Simon Peter said to Jesus, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow me afterwards. Lord, where are you going?

Life doesn't always go according to plan, does it? Because you know, we can make lots of plans, we can have high hopes, and we can dream great dreams. We can even have lots of plans for our children and even our grandchildren, and we can have high hopes for them, and we can dream dreams for their future. But as we all know, sometimes there's a vast difference between our plans, hopes and dreams, and the reality of life. Because life, as we know it, it doesn't always go according to plan. Life doesn't always give us everything we hoped for. Life doesn't always fulfill our greatest dreams. Sometimes there's a vast difference between our plans, hopes and dreams, and the reality of life. And that's because life is often full of changes. Life hits us with things that we never planned for. Life hits us with things that we never hoped for. Life hits us with things that we never dreamed of happening. And sometimes these are good things. Things that are far above and beyond our asking or our thinking. But more often than not, that's not the case. Because the reality of life always reminds us that our plans can come to nothing, and our hopes can be dashed, and our dreams can be taken away. And sometimes due to no fault of our own, these things take place because of our circumstances. Whether it's the circumstances of our home, or our family, or our education, or our finances, or our job, or maybe an illness, or even the loss of someone. There are all these situations and circumstances in our lives that can take away from us our plans, hopes and dreams that we had maybe for ourselves or even for others. But you know, it's how we deal with all these changes in our lives that's so important. Because we must always remember that everything that takes place in our lives, it's there for a reason. We might not understand why. We might not be able to see how we might have many questions that no one is able to answer. But all these things that the Lord appoints in our lives, they're not to drive us away from the Lord. They're always to drive us to the Lord. All these things are to make us realize that the Lord is in control. The Lord is sovereign over our lives. He has appointed all things and he's working all things together for good, and ultimately for his own glory. And you know, when you think about this, and when I was thinking about this, you know, I always go back to that poem. I'm sure you know the poem. It's a well-known poem called The Divine Weaver. And how it's an anonymous poem, but the writer, he just says, my life is but a weaving between my Lord and me. I cannot choose the colors. He worketh steadily. Sometimes he weaves sorrow, and I in foolish pride forget that he sees the upper and I the underside. And then he says, not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why the dark threads are as needful in the weaver skillful hand as much as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern he has planned. And you know, sometimes there's a vast difference between our plans, hopes and dreams and the reality of life. Sometimes there are things that we never planned for never hoped for never dreamed of. But as we said, it's how we deal with these changes in our lives. That's so important. Because the Lord has appointed them. The Divine Weaver has put them there. And he's put them there not to drive us away from him, but always to drive us to him. And you know, that's what every disciple of Jesus has to learn. And that's what we see when we come to this passage. That's what these disciples had to learn. Because as we listen into this conversation between Jesus and his disciples, Jesus tells his disciples something that is going to, you could say, destroy their plans, hopes and dreams. And I'd like us just this morning to listen into this conversation and I want us to notice three things.

Because Jesus describes as he gives us a shocking declaration, then he makes he gives a soothing description. And then he also gives a saving direction. So a shocking declaration, a soothing description, and a saving direction. So first of all, a shocking declaration, a shocking declaration. Look again at verse 33. Jesus says, little children, yet a little while I am with you, you will seek me and just as

I said to the Jews. So now I also say to you, where I am going, you cannot come. And you commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples. If you have love for one another, Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow me afterwards. Now this conversation between Jesus and his disciples, it's taking place in the upper room. And as devout Jews, Jesus and the disciples, they've gathered in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem, and they've gathered there to observe the Passover. It's Thursday evening. It's now the night before Jesus is to be crucified. As we were told in verse 31, Judas has gone out into the darkness to betray Jesus. And then Jesus, he institutes the Lord's supper.

He takes bread. He gives thanks. He says to the disciples, this is my body. Do this in remembrance of me. And then he takes the cup of the Messiah and he says to them, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

[7 : 05] And it seems then that after the Lord's supper has been instituted by Jesus, Jesus then makes this shocking declaration. He says to them in verse 33, little children, yet a little while I am with you, you will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you where I am going, you cannot come. But you know what's remarkable is that even though this Jesus makes this shocking declaration, Jesus speaks to them so lovingly and so compassionately.

He speaks to his disciples and he says to them, little children, little children. He says, I'm leaving you, but I'm leaving you not because I don't love you. I'm leaving you because I love you. And of course, the reason Jesus was leaving his disciples, it was because it was necessary for their salvation. It was necessary for our salvation that Jesus left his disciples and went to the cross. But Jesus knew that this would come as a shock to his disciples. Jesus knew that they wouldn't want him to leave. And Jesus knew that they wouldn't understand what was going on, which is why Jesus says to them, you will seek me, but where I am going, you cannot come. And you know, just before Peter butts in and questions what Jesus is saying, Jesus gives to his disciples this new commandment. He says in verse 34, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. You know, what a lasting testimony to leave his disciples.

The last thing Jesus says to his disciples, it's one of the hardest things to obey. We all know that the greatest commandment from Deuteronomy six is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself. But then Jesus says here, a new commandment I give you, you love one another as I have loved you. You love one another as I have loved you, which means that Jesus doesn't just ask us to love our neighbor as ourselves. He asks us to love our neighbor as Jesus loves us, which means that we're to love the people in our congregation and in our community, just like Jesus loves us. And you know, it's no wonder Jesus says, he says by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love towards one another. Jesus says that the world will know that you belong to me if you love your congregation and if you love your community, if you love them with the love of Jesus. And as we all know the love of Jesus that knows no boundaries, the love of Jesus has no restrictions. It shows no partiality. Jesus has no preferences.

The love of Jesus is to whosoever. And this, you know, this is the teaching of Jesus. This is the last thing Jesus says to his disciples, a new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you. But you know, as it was in the case in many, with many occasions, Peter wasn't listening to Jesus. Peter's mind was on Jesus's shocking declaration, which is why he brings the conversation all the way back round to what Jesus has just said. And Peter asks, then in verse 36, he says, Lord, where are you going? Peter's asking Jesus, what are you talking about? What do you mean you're leaving? Where are you going?

[10 : 56] That's not the plan. That's not the plan of the Messiah. That's not the way of the Christ. Lord, where are you going? But you know, Peter's asking this question because he had a limited

understanding of Jesus, and he didn't trust God's plan on purpose. Because Peter and many of the other disciples, they all thought that the Messiah, they all thought that as the Messiah, Jesus would be crowned king in Israel. The disciples thought that Jesus had come to Jerusalem, not just to have the Passover, but to overthrow the powers of the Romans.

The disciples thought that Jesus had come to recapture the nation of Israel. They thought that Jesus had come to sit upon the throne of King David. The disciples thought that Jesus would be Israel's new leader and restore the kingdom of Israel to its former glory.

You know, that's why you had James and John asking Jesus to do them a favor. Do you remember when James and John came to Jesus and they said, Lord, do us a favor? They said, grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory. And you remember what Jesus said to them, you don't have a clue what you're asking me. You don't know what you're asking. And they didn't know what they were asking because they had a limited understanding of Jesus. And they didn't trust God's plan on purpose. And the same was true for Peter on another occasion. You remember when Jesus asked that all important question, who do you say that I am? And Peter responded, he said, he gave the confession of the Christian, you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And yet in his next breath, Peter is rebuking Jesus and saying to Jesus, he's rebuking him because Jesus has just said that he's going to suffer and be rejected and killed and three days rise again. And Jesus has to pull Peter aside and say to Peter, you are not setting your mind on things above. You're setting your mind on the things of man. You know, Peter and all the disciples, they all had a limited understanding of Jesus. And they didn't trust God's plan on purpose. And because of this, when Jesus announced that he's leaving them, they're completely confused. They never saw it coming. They weren't prepared for it. It's a shocking declaration for them. And you know, my friend, we can be so like the disciples because we can have all our plans, hopes and our dreams. And we can have everything in our mind as to what's going to happen and how things are going to go and how things are going to work out. But it doesn't take much for all these things to be turned upside down in a moment and for us to be caught unaware and to become confused and shocked. And sometimes just like Peter, we question what the Lord is doing and we question the Lord's plan and purpose in our lives. And we wonder how all these things are going to work out and what the future will actually hold for us now.

But you know, the reason we question the Lord at all is because like the disciples, we have a limited understanding of Jesus. And we're not trusting God's plan and purpose. And you know, I can only speak for myself when I say this. I knew that I would be an interim moderator at some point in my ministry, but I never thought it would be so soon. I never thought I'd be the interim moderator for Carl away. And yet here we are. This is the Lord's plan.

This is the Lord's purpose for us. And I'm here to help and support you as a congregation as best as I can. And today I have the responsibility to make what is in many ways a shocking declaration to declare you vacant as a congregation. But you know, when I come to this wonderful passage, I'm reminded that when Jesus had to make a shocking declaration to his disciples, he sought to comfort his disciples by giving to them this soothing description. And that's what I want us to see. Secondly, we see a soothing description. So a shocking declaration.

[15 : 31] It was followed by a soothing description. Look at verse one in chapter 14. Jesus says, let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself that where I am there, you may be also. So even though the disciples couldn't understand what Jesus was doing and where he was going. And even though they never saw it coming and thought that it would never happen to them, you know, they weren't prepared for this.

They weren't ready for this. And Jesus knew that. Jesus understood that this was a shock to them. Jesus knew that his departure would would cause confusion and upset and even even frustration. But you know, what's so beautiful is that Jesus doesn't tell the disciples, he doesn't say to them, get a grip of yourselves. He doesn't say, pull yourselves together.

Jesus doesn't say, I told you this three times already, but you weren't listening. And the thing is, Jesus had told them three times already about his crucifixion death and resurrection.

He had told them three times, three times in Mark's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed. And on the third day, he will rise again. Jesus had told them all this three times, but

they didn't take notice of it. They didn't pay attention to it. They didn't listen. But with Jesus's departure now going to be a reality. The disciples are heartbroken. They're in turmoil. They have so much doubt and anxiety because they don't know what the future will hold for them. And yet what we see here is that Jesus speaks so lovingly to them. Jesus speaks to them with such care and compassion. And notice Jesus doesn't speak to their head. Jesus speaks to their heart. Jesus addresses the hearts of the disciples. He speaks to them so intimately and so personally. And he says to them, let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. And you know, my friend, this is the wonder of who Jesus is. Jesus knew and understood what the disciples were going through. He could sympathize with all their weaknesses. And the remarkable love that Jesus has for his disciples is that he sought to comfort them. Even though in a few hours time, he is going to be crucified for their sin and die a criminal's death. And yet here is Jesus and he's saying to his disciples, in fact, he's commanding them and he's saying to them, let not your hearts be troubled. You already trust in God. He says, now trust in me. Trust in me. I know my friend, what better words could be told to you when your world has been turned upside down? What better voice to hear when life takes those unexpected turns? Because there's no better comfort than to have Jesus come alongside us in our times of difficulty and doubting and for him to tenderly and compassionately speak into our hearts and into our lives and say, let not your heart be troubled. Let not your heart be troubled. But you know, Jesus, he doesn't leave it there because he goes on to explain to his disciples that where he's going, they will be there one day. He says, in my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there, you may be also. You know, the language that Jesus uses there in verses two and three, it's language that was so beautiful and so graphic because it's the language of a Jewish wedding. It's the language of a Jewish wedding. And the disciples, they would have picked up on the straight away. They would have known that Jesus was describing this procedure of a Jewish wedding. Because when a man was going to marry a woman, the man would have to leave his father's house and go to the house of his prospective bride.

And there, when he reaches, when the man reaches the house, he would have to negotiate a price with the father of the bride. He would have to negotiate a price for the bride's redemption, because it would actually cost the father to lose his daughter. It would cost him to lose his daughter from the family home. But once that redemption price was agreed and paid, they were then betrothed. They were engaged to be married. And from that point onwards, that marriage covenant between the couple, it was then established. And so not long after that, the man, he would return to his father's house. He would leave his wife, his future wife in the family home, and he would return on his own and return to his father's house.

[21 : 10] And the groom, he would then, in his father's house, he would start preparing it, preparing his father's house, this suitable accommodation for him and his new wife to live in. And the accommodation, it would probably be something like an extension onto the father's house.

But once the suitable accommodation is all ready, the bridegroom would then leave and go back to the father of the bride's house. He would leave his father's house and come to the house of the father of the bride, and he would take his bride and take her home to be with himself. And you know, that's the language Jesus is using here with his disciples.

He's using the language of a Jewish marriage. And immediately when we understand this, we understand what Jesus is saying, and we see that Jesus is describing himself like the bridegroom. And all his disciples in whatever century we're living in, we are the church.

We are the bride. And Jesus, he has come into this world. He has left the father's house. He came into this world to negotiate a price for our redemption. Jesus then paid the price for our redemption. Jesus redeemed the church, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by his own precious blood. Jesus established that marriage covenant on the cross by the blood of the new covenant. He secured our redemption through his death.

And like a faithful bridegroom who makes preparations for his new bride, Jesus then leaves his bridegroom. And he goes to the father's house and he prepares a place for her. That's what Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there, you may be also. It's such beautiful imagery of Jesus's love and care and compassion towards his bride, the church. Because even though Jesus has had to return to the father's house, he promises he will not forget them. Even though he's gone

to the father's house, he promises that he will continue to watch over them like a good shepherd. He continues to promise them comfort by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He says that he will continue to pray for his church and that one day that no one knows except the father, one day he'll come again and take them to be with himself. I love these words because we have this great promise that when we trust in Jesus, when we commit our life to Jesus, when we follow [24 : 02] Jesus Christ, he's the one who speaks into our heart. He's the one who promises that he's preparing at the father's house, this place of many mansions. He's preparing this place for his people, but even here, right now, he's preparing his people for that place.

And you know, not to be the greatest comfort to know that Jesus is making preparations. Jesus has it all in hand. He's in control. He knows the situation. He's working all things together for good and ultimately for his own glory. And you know, my friend, what better hands to be in than to be in the hands of Jesus? What better voice to hear than the voice of Jesus? What better words to be told than these words? Let not your heart be troubled.

And you know, when Jesus said those words, what the disciples had to learn and what we have to learn is to surrender everything into the hands of Jesus, we're to surrender all our plans, hopes and dreams into the hands of Jesus, because Jesus knows what's best for us. And you know, for all his faults, Peter, Peter must have learned that lesson.

He must have thought back to the situation that he needed to surrender everything to Jesus. Because when he wrote his letter, his first letter to encourage Christians, his first letter, he said, he told them, cast all your cares upon him because he cares for you, surrender everything to Jesus because he knows you and loves you and knows what's best for you. Cast all your cares upon him, he says, because he cares for you. There was a hymn that was written in the late 19th century. It was written by a church of England minister called William Sparrow Simpson. And what the hymn sought to emphasize is that if Jesus surrendered his life for us, then we ought to be willing to surrender our life for him.

And the words of the hymn that he wrote, they were so simple and yet so profound. And maybe you've heard the hymn before when I quote it, there's a lot of repetition in it, but I'll just quote the important words. He says, Jesus, Jesus, all for Jesus, all I am and have and ever hope to be. Then he says, all of my ambitions, hopes and plans, I surrender these into your hands. And then he says, why? Because it's only in your will that I am free. It's only in your will that I am free. Jesus, Jesus, all for Jesus, he says, all I am and have and ever hope to be. You know, when we receive a shocking declaration, what better soothing description to be given than to be told that Jesus has it all in hand?

[27 : 18] He's in control. He knows the situation. He's working all things together for good and ultimately for his own glory. What better hands to be in than in the hands of Jesus? What better voice to hear than the voice of Jesus? What better words to be told than the words that Jesus says to his disciples here? Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God.

You believe also in me. So in this upper room conversation, we see a shocking declaration, a soothing description. But then lastly and briefly, Jesus gives a saving direction, a saving direction. Look at verse four. Jesus says, and you know the way to where I'm going.

God said to him, Lord, we do not know where you're going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. You know, I think it's safe to say that these words need a sermon by themselves to be explained and preached upon properly. And maybe we'll do that another day. But you know what I want us just to see briefly from these verses is that we have one of the greatest questions here in the Bible. And that's followed by one of the greatest answers in the Bible.

Because Thomas and well, considering our current circumstances, it's ironic that his name is Thomas. But Thomas says to him, Lord, we do not know where you're going. How can we know the way? Thomas was asking for clarity. He wanted to know where Jesus was going. Thomas was asking for direction. He wanted to know how to get to where Jesus was going. Lord, how can we know the way? And it was a great question. It's a question that everyone should be asking. If you're not a Christian here today, if you're unconverted, unsaved out of Christ on the broad road, whatever you want to describe yourself, if you're sitting here today, unconverted, you should be asking this question. Lord, how can I know the way?

How can I know the way to be with Jesus? How can I know the way to the Father's house? How can I know the way to have my sins forgiven? How can I know the way to have peace with God? How

my need? My good hill will lift mine eyes. From whence doth come my need? My good hill will lift mine eyes. From whence